

PROCLAIMING THE WORD

Using the Bible in worship (2)

WILD GOOSE RESOURCE GROUP

There are some vital, basic questions:

What is the place of reading the Bible in church?

- Is it really the priest or ministers job?
-
- Is it a chore which the elders or readers have to do?
-
- Is it only those with elocuted voices who should do it?

Why do we read the Bible in church?

- Because it is a tradition?
-
- Because it says in the service book we should?

Is it less important than the hymns and sermon?

- Does God in some way speak the Word when it is read?

Do not proceed before reflecting on these. If through our reading of the Bible in church we are proclaiming the Word of God, then this comes with some responsibility.

Through that Word, God addresses us. It is the property of all the people, and should, in many senses, be more important than the hymns or the sermon, which can at best comment on what God has spoken. They cannot replace or be substitutes for Gods Word.

So it falls on us to communicate Gods Word convincingly, because we believe it is of value and important. This being true, we are engaging in public proclamation, a privilege and an activity for the benefit of the listening public. There is no loss of face in ensuring it is done to the best of our ability.

At least three types of preparation are necessary:

- advance personal preparation;
- familiarisation with the text;
- practicalities in situ.

These hold true for lay and ordained alike.

Advance personal preparation

What we do not carry within ourselves can never be communicated to others:

- Do I, as the reader understand this passage?
- What else is being read and do the other passages relate to each other?
- Are their verses whose meaning is vague to me?

- Is there a book which will help me understand?

It is not important that the reader believes every single word intellectually, and certainly not that the reader feels every emotion expressed. *But* the readers should believe that the Word is important for the comfort or disturbance of those who hear it.

Familiarisation with the text

It is important that the reader feels physically familiar with the text on the page:

- Read the passage out loud several times, until the words and intonation feel right in your mouth.
- Decide where there should be pauses.
- Notice when you might run out of breath.
- Identify any words that should be emphasised.

Therefore if need be, photocopy the passage, enlarge the print or re-type it to help phrasing and breathing. Then put your copy in the lectern/ ambo at the appropriate place in the Bible or lectionary.

Practicalities in situ

It is of supreme importance that all readers have at least one opportunity of rehearsing the passage in the place where it will be read.

- What does it feel like to stand at the lectern/ ambo?
- When will I move there and back?
- How loudly should I speak?
- How slowly should I speak?
- How do I introduce and end the passage?

This is not just to be familiar with the acoustic - which may change depending on heat and number of people present - but to feel comfortable with your body in the location. It allows you to see whether or not there is a microphone and how it switches off and on.

It lets you discover whether the book rest could be raised or lowered so that you can see the congregation. It helps you plan where to sit and what is your route to the reading place.

Some churches favour people walking to the lectern during the preceding hymn, others may not want, for example the Gloria ruined by someone walking across the front (especially if it is sung by a choir).

Different traditions have different ways of introducing and ending the scripture readings. A silence may follow. The reader may be in charge of the silence, and should stand at the lectern intentionally until sufficient time has passed to let people inwardly accept that this is Gods Word.

Here are some hints gleaned from the experience of workshop participants....

- Pray beforehand that this will be a time when God uses your voice to communicate Gods Word.

- Do not be ashamed or embarrassed about reading.
- Carry yourself confidently and speak, not with a phoney accent, but using your normal voice.
- Generally speaking, read at half your normal speed... even if there is a microphone - if you read at normal speech speed, you do not have the presence of mind or the breath to project your voice to the back of the church.
- Take time to look up and out at the congregation as you read. You never give an important message to someone with your eyes averted from their face.
- Ask someone to reflect with you on how you read, whether it was audible and intelligible.
- Discover whether you have any distracting habits of which you are unaware which need attended to... mumbling the first line, dropping your voice at the end of each sentence, hurrying through The Word of the Lord at the end of the reading, clearing your throat excessively, scratching your head, etc.

Considering the content: further reflections

1) What might be an appropriate way to lead into or follow these texts?

a) Is a brief sentence of background required?

- e.g. Lamentations Ch. 2: 10-16: 'The painful poetry of people whose cities and towns were destroyed.'
- e.g. Psalm 12: 'A prayer for help in times of desperation.'

b) Both of the above evoke contemporary situations. Should the congregations respond "Thanks be to God?"

What else might be effective?

Or does the passage need any amendment?

- e.g. Mark Ch. 10: 1-9: which uses pronouns but never actually names the person being referred to.

It would make more sense to initially substitute the person's name, rather than lose the congregation in a guessing game on the subject of the story.

Attention to such preparation is a confirmation of the seriousness of our intent, a confirmation of our desire for the people of God to hear... and be transformed.

For further Wild Goose resources using Biblical material, see:

- **Cloth For the Cradle:** Readings and liturgical resources for Advent & Christmas.
- **Stages On The Way:** Readings and liturgical resources for Lent and Easter.
- **Present On Earth:** Readings and liturgical resources on the life of Jesus.
- **He Was In The World:** Meditations for congregations.
- **Jesus & Peter:** Conversations from biblical texts.

© WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow G2 3DH, Scotland.

WGRG, Iona Community, 4th Floor, Savoy House,
140 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow G2 3DH, Scotland.

T: 0141 332 6343

F: 0141 332 1090

E: wgrg@iona.org.uk

Info: www.iona.org.uk/wgrg_home.php

Holy City: www.holycity-glasgow.co.uk

Online Shop: www.wgrg.co.uk